DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 035 617 TE 000 618

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TITLE Preparation for Teaching of Literature: Some Problems of Continuity.
PUB DATE 67
NOTE 14p.; Speech given at the National Council of Teachers of English Annual Convention (Honolulu, 1967)

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.80
DESCRIPTORS Course Content, *English Instruction, Individualized Reading, *Literature Appreciation, Reading Habits, Reading Interests, *Reading Material Selection, Relevance (Education), Student Motivation, *Teacher Qualifications, Teacher Role

ABSTRACT

Literature programs that emphasize individualized reading have been found to significantly benefit life-long reading patterns. Since reading interests and motivation vary greatly, the English teacher, while fostering responsible choices, should let each student explore his personal interests at his own pace. Serving as a resource for his students, the teacher, by applying such outside criteria as book awards, can make available that literature which answers both student needs and the literary requirements of the school curriculum. Dialogue with individual students, shared classroom discussion, and the use of composition assignments to clarify ideas further effectuate literature programs in which the student is offered a framework for dealing with his own problems and a means of acquiring a literary heritage. Finally, the essential factor in any successful literature program is the teacher's ability to transmit both a personal interest in students and his own involvement in literature. (MF)

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PREPARATION FOR TEACHING OF LITERATURE: SOME PROBLEMS OF CONTINUITY

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The essential ingredient in a good literature program is an effective teacher: one whose interest in books extends beyond the average and the norm; one who seeks to understand the learner, his needs, interests, and aspirations; and one who seeks to obtain and use feedback from the learner before making choices as to methods and materials for his instruction.

Books may no longer be considered without acknowledging other instructional media and the challenge these media make to the book and the reader. Competition from audiovisual material makes discernment and implementation of book use necessary, and the selection of desirable purposes which books and literature fulfill in a unique manner. The teacher's task is to foster responsible choice in a learning environment where books, television, movies, and recordings coexist in fruitful harmony with the learner, his interests, and purposes.

This paper is developed on the premise that preparation for the teaching of literature will have continuity when teachers (1) understand the role of literature in life and the school curric-

TE 000 618

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ulum; (2) choose proper aims and objectives for teaching it; (3) distill research findings into a theory of teaching that employs and promotes reflection; and (4) apply this theory to every aspect of teaching.

During the past seventy-five years the emphasis in teaching literature, as determined by stated objectives, has moved from instruction in a common body of literary materials, to instruction for satisfaction of individual needs through wide reading to instruction for acquiring a literary heritage. The effort to break away from fixed reading lists and a subject-centered curriculum appeared in 1917[1] with the following statement of objectives:

1. To broaden, deepen, and enrich the imaginative life of the student.
2. To provide materials out of which may be created worthy and lasting ideals of life and conduct.
3. To raise the level of appreciation and enjoyment in reading.
4. To provide intellectual and spiritual stimulation.
5. To encourage development of intellectual faculties: sensitivity, imagination, thinking, and interpretation.

Through three decades the teaching of literature aimed at being learner-centered,[2] at enriching the experiences of the pupil through stories, poems, plays, essays, and books of information.[3] In order to extend pupil experiences, ways for correlating literature with other school subjects were tried, especially with the subjects, art, music, and social studies. The dynamic quality of the literary experience was used to encourage the reader in exploring his own nature, the world in which he lived, other personalities, and other ways of life through individualized instruction, wide reading, and the development of lifelong reading habits.

Under the sponsorship of NCTE, MLA, CEA, and ASA, there has been continuous examination through the 50's and 60's of the place of literature in the English curriculum and the objectives for teaching it. On these issues teachers of English at the present time do not agree. There is some consensus of opinion about the initial importance of literature as a humane study, the need for a common literary background if the cultural and humanistic heritage is to be a part of education, and the development of a sequence of instruction in representative literary works for superior pupils.[4]

Research in teaching literature must be interpreted in terms of the changing objectives and character of American education. In the past, research on instruction in this subject has

dealt chiefly with the following aspects: reading interests of pupils, spontaneous and teacher-directed; merit of extensive as opposed to intensive teaching; observations and surveys of classroom practices, and evaluation of pupil responses.

Studies of the reading interests of pupils have revealed that interest patterns vary with sex, maturity, intelligence, types of literature available to the reader, freedom of choice, source of reading material, and general reader response. On the assumption that interests are a primary source of pupil motivation, research on reading interests has had significant implications for teacher preparation: in suggesting points at which teaching literature should begin; in emphasizing development of new pupil interests in improving reading tastes; in using libraries of the classroom, school, community, and home, as well as the newstand for sources of reading materials; and in analyzing pupil responses to books.

Surveys of the status of teaching literature in this country show that little time is spent on teaching literature in the elementary school, factual details are stressed to the neglect of insight and understanding of cultural values, teaching composition is divorced from teaching literature, a sequential pattern of instruction is lacking, and literature is generally taught for the class not the individual.

Studies of pupil responses to literature are of special significance in the preparation of a teacher. Any model of research in this area must include not only an analysis of the reading act, but the content of reading matter and pre-disposition of the reader. It has been disclosed that many motives cause a person to read even in a single reading experience, such as: a searching for physical, intellectual, and emotional development; social acceptance; play and change; beauty, harmony, logic, and order; and quality in writing. Research is just beginning to analyze pupil responses in terms of differences in background, interest, personality patterns, competence, and skills.

As a result of a series of examinations of responses to literature these pupil behaviors were suggested for further analysis: obtaining the plain sense of the material; reading critically, with attention to the relationship of ideas and the quality of writing; going beyond the written word to implications, points of view, and future actions of characters; reacting emotionally and imaginatively, as in identifying with situations, or being sensitive to and enjoying artistry of espression; incorporating reading experiences into one's self, so as to develop an understanding of man, society, institutions, or refining one's personal-social philosophy, or developing new interests and habits; and becoming acquainted with an increasing number of books and authors that have made significant contributions to the literary heritage.[5]

A survey[6] was made in 1961 to appraise the teaching of literature in terms of its effects on lifelong reading habits. This survey consisted of interviews with members of a high school class twenty years after graduation. The program of extensive reading in the school emphasized individualized reading by the students and was characterized by a high degree of interest in the student and his needs by the teacher and librarian. The high school program stressed personal contact and discussion between teachers and individual students, careful guidance in the selection of books and periodicals, and the development in the students of a sense of responsibility for their own progress. This study indicated that adult reading patterns were significantly superior. Members of the class appeared to be applying the basic principles used in school in guiding the reading of their own children.

Based upon the western tradition a theory of teaching is proposed: the pupil can generate and refine his values within his ongoing experience and improve his ability to cope with life in a reflective spirit; he can make a controlled use of sentiency, memory, and imagination in a balance that is appropriate to his particular purpose or problem at hand; he is capable of responsible choice and of learning from its consequences, and any experience resultant of responsible choice increases his ability to direct

subsequent experience. In this belief the teacher recognizes his function as that of freeing the pupil through his own individual creative effort within the thinking process by self-scrutiny and an analytical checking out of ideas. The object of teaching is to cause the student to develop creativity, judgment, and responsible decision. Problems of learning under this theory must be studied by a conceptual scheme which views responsible personal choice as a central fact of experience, intelligent behavior as conditioned by the discovery of meaning, and human behavior as clinically correctable.

In a reading environment that offers personal satisfactions for every pupil the teacher of literature should have a viable interest in books and excellent writing, as well as in pupils and their problems of growing-up. The disadvantaged student, with few contacts in reading to experience the fun and adventure connected with it, should be assisted in discovering the excitement to be found on the printed page. The pupil, dissatisfied with himself, his family, and his peer associates, should be introduced to many of-a-kind books for helping him through puzzling, complicated life situations.

A pupil disturbed by nearly-overwhelming circumstance learns from appropriate literary selections that he cannot change today's reality, but he can increase his understanding of it and hence change its significance. Literature becomes the framework

which offers him ways of working out his own problems. It is difficult to know in advance what theme, character, or plot will suggest a solution or incite change in a student's behavior. No book will produce the same effect on any two pupils.

Intellectual activity is the same, whether in a third grade classroom or a graduate seminar in literature. The teacher is wise in not enforcing a uniform regimentation upon pupils. Instead he permits each student to determine for himself the circumstances under which he works most effectively, compatible with his temperament, range of experience, and stage of knowledge.

At an early age the child should be encouraged to ramble through many different kinds of books until he finds the models that give him satisfaction. A great part of reading is exploring. Simple reading experiences will enable the young child to see himself as a reader, and to build a self concept as a reader. Discussions between teacher and pupil help relate reading to his personal life and open avenues for identification.

Critics of the "easy-to-read" books are justifiably concerned over the large number of watered-down narratives, weak in vocabulary, content, and form, that are now filling the shelves of bookstores for all ages. This flood of books makes careful evaluation by teachers necessary. Such books as:[7] McClosky's Make Way for Ducklings; Brown's Once a Mouse; Lenski's The Little Farm; Minarik's Little Bear; Wilder's Little House in the Big Woods; DeJong's House of Sixty Fathers; Henry's King of the Wind; and Speare's Witch of Blackbird Pond show that it is possible

to combine literary quality, attractive format, interesting appeal, and suitable readability level in books for young and older readers.

The prospective teacher should be aware of the means available for selecting the best in juvenile literature. He should be familiar with the general awards (Newberry, Caldecott, Spring Book Festival, Fifty Books of the Year), special interest awards (Jane Addams Children's Books, Aurianne Children's Book, Child Study Association, Mass Media), awards for lasting contribution (Laura Ingalls Wilder, Regina Medal, and Lewis Carroll Shelf), children's choice awards (Boys' Club of America, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Pacific Northwest, Sequoyah Children's, William Allen White), publisher's awards, state awards, and awards in other countries. He should know the winners of and the eligibility criteria for these awards.

Pupils should be encouraged to name, define, test, control, and predict realia. Through continuous communication involving a sharing of meaning with pupils the teacher can lead them to perceptions and discoveries of reality and experiences with language as a tool for understanding and advancing it, which they do not apprehend without teacher guidance. There is no substitute for shared discourse in the careful formulation of ideas, and no substitute for writing in the clarification of ideas. Dialogue, discussion, and writing are significant in the preparation of a teacher of literature. Every teacher is in a position to introduce

a reflective quality into his relationships with students. It is his relentless effort to see beyond the immediate and the actual, coupled with the responsible checking out of emergent ideas that results in the creative, thoughtful responses of his pupils to literature.

Facts simply learned without organization are often useless. The reward for learning is in the use of what is learned. Literature through its abundance of clear and concise narration offers many opportunities to study the thinking process: to analyze a situation in which a problem arises, to consider the alternatives for action and the possible consequences of each alternative on the behavior of the characters involved. The teacher in the role of communicator and model leads the pupil, through the process of thinking rather than memorizing isolated facts, by his calm, persistent inquiry; by the nature of his questions; and by the kinds of information he supplies, to check meaning and understanding.[8] For example, such questions as these stimulate thoughtful discussion: What effect did Karana's decision to return for her brother have on her life (Island of the Blue Dolphins)? How did her decision to make friends with the leader influence the wild dogs? How did Nat's father react to the apprenticeship of his son in a ship's chandlery (Carry on, Mr. Bowditch)? In what way was Nat's behavior conditioned by this circumstance? The alert teacher anticipates the answers of his students and knows when to insist on warranted grounds of evidence for a stated position.

A country's writings for its young readers reflect the essence of its vision of itself and the world. In no subject does the national character emerge as it does in the juvenile literature of a nation. Well-compiled anthologies, beautiful in format and intelligent in selection and use of literary materials, as A Harvest of Russian Children's Literature,[9] mirror the ideals and ideas of a people and their struggles to attain them.

The highly imaginative and compressed language of the poet offers examples of hidden ideas and feelings that may be teased out and explored through discussion. Not only the literary style of the writer but also the time of his life span and personal experiences illuminate his intended meaning. These poems[10] by Walter de la Mare and Emily Dickinson are lyrical in sound and enigmatic in thought:

"Jim Jay"
and
"To Hear an Oriole Sing"

An enthusiasm for books and a good intuitive feel for teaching literature do not just happen. They are based on a solid knowledge of the subject, a high degree of mastery of instructional materials, knowledge of the learning process, and skill in the use of logic and the scientific method. A teacher may acquire these skills and knowledge, but if he is a person who sees nothing beautiful and powerful in literature he is not likely to ignite others with a sense of the intrinsic value and excitement of the subject.

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